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Message Text

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15
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-04 ISO-00 SAM-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 /062 W
---------- 006132
R 271550Z DEC 74
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1326
INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES
AMCONSUL LUANDA
AMCONSUL OPORTO
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT PO
SUBJ: VOTER REGISTRATION AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN METROPOLITAN
PORTUGAL

SUMMARY: WITH THREE WEEK VOTER REGISTRATION PERIOD HALF COMPLETED, REGISTRATION OF EXPECTED 5.5 MILLION VOTERS NOW SUBSTANTIALLY AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN ALL BUT TWO OF NATION'S 22 DISTRICTS. SLIGHT EXTENSION OF ERGISTRATION DEADLINE GRANTED, WHICH PROBABLY WILL PUSH BACK DATE OF ELECTIONS ONE OR TWO WEEKS AT MOST. END SUMMARY.

1. REGISTRATION OF VOTERS FOR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, WHICH BEGAN DECEMBER 9 AND WAS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO TERMINATE DECEMBER 29, IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE ACCORDING TO COMMANDER ALMEIDA E SOUSA, CHIEF OF ELECTORAL DEPARTMENT OF MINISTRY OF INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION. IN FIRST WEEK ALONE 42 PERCENT OF TOTAL PROJECTED QUALIFIED VOTERS REGISTERED. WELL OVER 60 PERCENT OF
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EXPECTED 5.5 MILLION VOTERS HAVE NOW FILLED IN REGISTRATION FORMS

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IN THEIR LOCAL PRECINCTS. ONLY DISTRICTS WHICH ARE BEHIND
SCHEDULE ARE OPORTO AND MADEIRA, BUT CONCERTED EFFORTS UNDERWAY
THERE TO STEP UP REGISTRATION PACE.

2. ALMEIDA E SOUSA TOLD EMBOFF THAT SO FAR NO IRREGULARITIES HAVE
BEEN DISCOVERED IN REGISTRATION PROCESS. HE EXPECTS THAT ONLY A
FEW ISOLATED CASES MAY TURN UP, AS CONTROLS ARE SUFFICIENT AND
POLITICAL COST TO PARTY DISCOVERED TAMPERING WITH WORK OF
REGISTRATION BOARDS WOULD MORE THAN OUTWEIGH VALUE OF FEW EXTRA VOTES
GAINED. MAIN PROBLEMS SO FAR ARE TECHNICAL IN NATURE (LACK OF
SUFFICIENT FORMS IN CERTAIN ISOLATED PRECINCTS; DELAY IN OPORTO
AREA IN ESTABLISHMENT OF 5-MAN REGISTRATION TEAMS AS REQUIRED BY
LAW, ETC).

3. BECAUSE OF FAVORABLE PACE OF REGISTRATION, INTERNAL ADMIN-
ISTRATION MINISTRY INTRODUCED SLIGHT MODIFICATION TO ORIGINAL
REGISTRATION DEADLINE, WHICH ENVISIONED CLOSING-UP SHOP ON CHRISTMAS
AND BEFORE NEW YEAR'S DAY. NEW CUTOFF DATE WILL BE JANUARY 8.
ALMEIDA E SOUSA TOLD EMBOFF PRIVATELY THAT IT LOOKS AS IF ELECTIONS
WILL BE SLIGHTLY DELAYED A WEEK OR TWO FROM ORIGINAL MARCH 25
DATE FOR STRICTLY TECHNICAL REASONS (CAUSED BY NEW DEADLINE FOR
REGISTRATION). HE CONSIDERS SUCH A DELAY USEFUL FOR WORKING OUT
BUGS IN ELECTORAL MACHINERY AND OTHERWISE ASSURING MORE
COMPLETELY FAIR AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTION. IF GOP DOES DECIDE TO
DELAY ELECTION, AS WE EXPECT, AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 3/74
OF MAY 14 (ARTICLE 4, PARA 4) WILL BE SUBMITTED TO COUNCIL OFSTATE.

4. REGISTRATION OF EMIGRANTS ABROAD, UNLIKE THAT OF RESIDENTS IN
METROPOLITAN PORTUGAL, APPEARS TO BE OFF TO A SLOW START. FINAL
ELECTORAL LAW GIVES PORTUGUESE DIPLOMATIC AUTHORITIES BROAD
DISCRETION IN SETTING DURATION AND STARTING DATE OF REGISTRATION
PERIOD. SAME BROAD POWER GIVEN TO CHIEF LOCAL PORTUGUESE AUTHORITY
IN EACH OVERSEAS TERRITORY. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, FRANCE IS ONLY
AREA OUTSIDE OF PORTUGAL IN WHICH VOTER REGISTRATION HAS BEGUN.
REGISTRATION PERIOD THERE RUNS FROM DEC 14 - JAN 8.
AT LEAST ONE EMIGRANT GROUP HAS COMPLAINED PUBLICLY THAT
PORTUGUESE DIPLOMATIC AUTHORITIES IN FRANCE ARE NOT GIVING
ADEQUATE POBLICITY TO REGISTRATION PROCEDURES, WITH LIKELY
CONSEQUENCE THAT BULK OF ELIGIBLE EMIGRANTS WILL NOT REGISTER IN
TIME TO VOTE. PRESS ACCOUNTS INDICATE THAT ADMIRAL ROSA COUTINHO
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HAS SET UP PROCEDURES FOR ENFRANCHISEMENT OF PORTUGUESE TEMPORARILY
RESIDENT IN ANGOLA, BUT NO DETAILS ARE AVAILABLE HERE (CONSULATE LUAN
DA
MAY WISH TO COMMENT).

5. NUMBER OF AT LARGE SEATS IN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO BE
RESERVED FOR ENFRANCHISED EMIGRANTS STILL NOTSETTLED. PROMISED
SPECIAL LAW ON SUBJECT HAS NOT APPEARED, AND

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FINAL VERSION OF PART TWO OF ELECTORAL LAW MAKES NO MENTION OF SUBJECT.

6. COMMENT: PORTUGUESE PEOPLE, MANY OF WHOM HAVE NEVER VOTED IN THEIR LIVES, SEEM EAGER TO EXERCISE THEIR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS JUDGING FROM THE HEAVY TURNOUT AT THE REGISTRATION STATIONS. REGISTRATION IN CONSERVATIVE NORTHERN RURAL DISTRICTS SEEMS TO BE PROCEEDING AS WELL AS IN MORE POLITICIZED URBAN AREAS, PUTTING AT EASE MODERATES' FEARS THAT REGISTRATION IN THOSE AREAS WOULD BE LOW. COMMUNISTS AND OTHER LEFTISTS APPARENTLY HOPED REGISTRATION PROCESS WOULD BE SLOW, PERHAPS IN ORDER JUSTIFY CALL FOR POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS FOR A FEW MORE MONTHS, DURING WHICH TIME THEY COULD PROSELYTIZE FOR THEIR CAUSE. THIS POSSIBILITY NOW SEEMS REMOTE. IF THE COMMUNISTS WISH TO CAUSE A MAJOR DELAY IN ELECTIONS, THEY WILL HAVE TO FIND OR PROVOKE ANOTHER EXCUSE.

7. APPARENT DELAY IN REGISTRATION OF QUALIFIED EMIGRANTS DISTRESSING, AND PROMISES TO EVOKE SHARP PROTEST FROM EMIGRANT ORGANOZATIONS. PRESENT ELECTORAL LAW ALREADY DISENFRANCHISES MOST EMIGRANTS, AND BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS AND INADEQUATE PUBLICIZING OF INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO VOTE ABROAD WILL FURTHER CUT DOWN SIZE OF EMIGRANT VOTE. LOW REGISTRATION OF EMIGRANTS WILL REBOUND TO BENEFIR OF COMMUNIST PARTY WHICH OPPOSES ENFRANCHISEMENT OF EMIGRANTS BELIEVING THAT THEY AS A GROUP ARE BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE.
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